14: Westropp B-4, 5 (no date)1910-12
ER6 Rural Irish ER6
County Clare

suspected family coming to the well, and sprang out and bade the newcomers keep away. The parties quarrelled, and were reinforced, as the news spread, by all the women, children, dogs, and sympathisers of both families. At last guns and hay-forks were brought, and blood was on the point of being shed, when some one found that midnight had passed, and the contestants at once went home. The cattle gave good milk all that year, and the well was watched on succeeding May Eves with equally good results. The bitterness is said to have died out round the well some years ago, but is still apparent between the households in other matters.[25]

A charm to cure "slow churning" has already been described.[26] In 1892 a horrible case of stirring milk with a dried human hand in order to "bring butter" was reported from the Kilkee district, but I could never learn the details. A similar practice somewhat earlier, near Oola on the borders of Limerick and Tipperary, was brought to light after the death of a farmer by a quarrel, ending at the sessions, between his three sons for the possession of the ghastly object.

The method of "taking butter" practised near Craigbrien, to the south of Ennis, was to take a hair from the tail of each of the victim's cows on May morning, twist the hairs together, and dip them in the milk.[27] I heard of a protective knotting of seven hairs in each cow's tail near Edenvale in the same district, and of a magic dashing of water over the churn when the butter was slow to come,—an excellent natural aid in hot weather. The greasy substance called "May butter," lying on the grass with the dew, was used for milk charms near Clonlara. I heard of it more definitely at Kenry, County Limerick, where a woman gathered it in her apron, and a hare was seen rolling and rubbing itself in the "May butter"; the hare, when pursued, turned into a local witch. If you come into a house where churning is in progress, you should always "put your hand to the churn," *i.e.* give a few strokes

[25] So told to me by the late Hugh Massy Westropp, who, as nearest magistrate, had to intervene to keep the peace on more than one occasion, and was called up to the well on one May Eve.

[26] Vol. xxi., pp. 195-6, as told by the late Miss W. Westropp of Fortanne.

[27] So late Mrs. Stacpoole of Edenvale.

16:Messenger E-4,5 (1955-1966) 1969 ER6 Rural Irish ER6
(1959-1960) Inis Beag

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times are recognized as recently deceased islanders, but more often they are "strangers" from another generation or another region of Ireland. They appear and disappear without warning and travel silently singly or in small groups. Usually they pay little or no heed to the living who chance to observe them, but they will attack those who have wronged them and occasionally others for seemingly no reason. A man told me of being beaten severely by three unknown men, obviously shades, early one evening at the back of the island; he might have been killed but for the intervention of two women, also strangers to him. At one time, persons who feared being assaulted by vengeful or capricious ghosts carried coals to protect themselves. The folk believe that shades are souls of the dead in Purgatory, which embraces the earth as well as a spiritual locus. While on earth, they do [783] penance by laboring at economic tasks—carrying seaweed, planting gardens, and fishing—near their former homes, and the work that they accomplish is undone once they disappear.

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Christianity touches on the evil eye in more ways than providing the magical incantation, "God bless you.", which automatically opposes the power of God to that of the witch. Many islanders explain the evil eye by positing the presence of both the deity and the Devil in each human body. God rests on the right side and urges a person to do good deeds, while Satan rests on the left and tempts him to commit sins. In most individuals, the deity dominates the body much of the time, but in the case of one with the evil eye, the Devil somehow has gained perpetual ascendancy and transmits his destructive power through the left eye of the person. It is the constant flowing of malignant power from within which causes the disfigurement in or near the left eye of the witch. The association [822] of evil with the left is a phenomenon widely distributed among the peoples of the world, as is the linking of evil with black. Ghost masks are painted black to [171] symbolize their evil nature by the Anang of Nigeria, and sacrifices to deity and ancestors at shrines are made with the right hand, and to ghosts, witches, and the spirit of sorcery with the left. In Inis Beag, people who have swarthy skin, black 826
hair, and brown eyes, although not considered witches, are thought to possess evil 828
power of some sort and are to be avoided. A curate possessing these physical traits 754
who served in the island recently was mistrusted and shunned whenever possible [798] even though "a man chosen by God Almighty." An interesting conjecture is how successful would be the research in Inis Beag of an anthropologist with dark complexion and hair and a cast in his brown left eye.

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The afterworld of the Celts, known as the Isle of the Blest or the Land of Youth, lay to the west of Ireland. It has been sighted by a few fortunate Inis Beag fishermen, either low-lying on the horizon with lights sparkling when it has risen from the sea, as it does periodically, or in the ocean deeps with the spires of its buildings and their tolling bells near the surface. This is a forested land inhabited by souls of the dead, and by fairies who travel to and from the mainland in "fairy ships." Few islanders now syncretize the Isle of the Blest with the Christian Heaven, as was common a century ago, but there are those who claim to have seen fairy ships from there skirt Inis Beag headed for the mainland. These are masted schooners carrying lights with no signs of life on their decks, which heave into sight and vanish instantaneously and can move far more swiftly than their counter-